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AUTHOR Cunningham, Luvern L.
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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the Detroit Education Task Force and its efforts to develop a problem-solving agenda for the Detroit public schools. The paper describes the background and history of the task force and analyzes its relationship with the Detroit Central Board of Education and with administrators of the Detroit school system. The educational impact of "third party" groups in general is discussed, followed by a detailed examination of the Detroit Education Task Force and its function. A final section presents a number of observations and conclusions about the experience of the task force and discusses the possible benefits of developing similar "third party" groups in other school systems. (JG)

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THIRD PARTIES AS PROBLEM SOLVERS

A CASE REPORT

by

LUVERN L. CUNNINGHAM

Codirector, The Detroit Education Task Force

Director, Institutional Leadership Programs, Mershon Center
The Ohio State University

Novice G. Fawcett Professor of Educational Administration
The Ohio State University

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THIRD PARTIES AS PROBLEM SOLVERS

This is the story of a socio-political invention, born of crisis, and sustained by the belief that its mission is larger than crisis. The invention is a problem solving third party--the Detroit Education Task Force. Its creation resulted from a shared concern about the effectiveness of the Detroit Public Schools, even severe doubts about continuing the Detroit Public Schools as an institution. The maintenance and extension of the Detroit Education Task Force depends upon its effectiveness as measured by the institution to whom it owes its allegiance, a configuration of national, regional, and local interests, and the belief of several foundations that it is a noble experiment worthy of modest short term investment.[1]

Background and Context

The Task Force is a citizens' group served by a small professional staff. It has been charged by the Detroit Central Board of Education with problem solving responsibilities. Its commitment to problem solving as distinct from analysis, review and recommendation is reasonably unique in the history of citizen involvement in education. The Task Force is a third party in many respects. As its nearly two-year history has unfolded, dimensions of third

party activity has become clearer. It is those dimensions that provide the focus of much of this presentation.

The Task Force is the creature of the Detroit Central Board of Education, but not its captive. It is intimate with and remote from the Central Board simultaneously. It is assisted by the good will of the Central Board but not dependent upon it. It works hand-in-hand with its parent agency, supports the Board's mission, but is free to differ with it on issues and problems. The Task Force is expected to construct a problem solving agenda but enlists the participation of school officials in that process. The relationships between the Task Force and the Detroit Public Schools have been marked by affection, misunderstanding, respect, hostility, love, hate, friendliness, and tension. Always tension.

As a problem solving agent, the Task Force occupies rather unique terrain, e.g., it is legitimized by a public body, it serves an ambiguous "public interest," it is extremely heterogeneous in its membership, it has a professional staff that is marked by diversity, it is expected to exhibit neutrality, impartiality, and objectivity, and it is viewed as a temporary system at best. Unlike Community Progress, Inc. in New Haven or New Detroit, Inc. in Detroit,

the Task Force does not dispense resources and has little short range power regarding the allocation of resources within the Detroit Public Schools.

"Public" views of the Task Force are varied obviously. Most citizens of Detroit are unaware of its existence. Teachers and other school employees are developing an increasing recognition of its presence after nearly two years, but are generally not well informed about it. School administrators know about it and either tolerate, respect, fear or disregard it. Central Board members are responsible for its creation but hold widely varying views about it. Regional Board members (except chairpersons) are largely indifferent towards it. The Superintendent endorses and applauds its work but is inconvenienced by it. Nearby universities are aware of the Task Force and are involved in its work. Media leaders know about it, publicly recognize it, and have been friendly towards its leaders and professional staff. It is cheered by New Detroit, Inc. and from time-to-time receives recognition from other groups, individuals, or associations.

Detroit and Its School System

Detroit is the hub, if you'll pardon the expression, of the world's automobile industry. It is also a city marked with decay. The riots took their toll in 1967 and urban blight is everywhere. It is a city with extraordinary crime problems, a city at the center of the heroin traffic in the United States, and a city with the highest homicide rate in the nation. Last year, 751 homicides were committed within the city limits. That rate is growing--this year the homicide rate is beyond what it was a year ago. The unemployment rate for males between the ages of 16 and 25 is approximately 40%. The economy is tied fundamentally to the automobile industry. The harsh impact of inflation on this industry foreshadows severe employment problems ahead.

Detroit is the nation's fifth largest city. It is essentially a single industry town, deeply devoted to unions and collective bargaining as the mechanism for distributing income. It has grown rapidly during this century to a peak population of 1,849,568 in 1950. The ratio of whites to blacks has shifted dramatically in the past two and one half decades. In 1950 the city was 83.6% white, 16.4% black. In 1970 the ratio was 55.5% white and 44.5% black.[2] The school population in 1971 was 64.9% black, 33.3% white; in September 1974, 71.6% black, 26.4% white.

The school system is plagued by problems of retrenchment, declining enrollments, inflation, archaic structures and policies, decentralization and community control, public discontent and disaffection, racism, poor pupil achievement, security, inadequate finance, a fatigued work force, bad communications (internal and external), court ordered desegregation, tired leadership, contending authority systems, and malfunctioning collective negotiations processes. To name a few.

The kinds of problems junior and senior high school principals face in this city are staggering. Those of us in academic circles have little sense of the gut-grinding dilemmas that these people encounter every day. We should be shamed by our impotence as we stand witness to what occurs there.

A few months ago, Bernard Watson, a well known authority on urban educational problems from Temple University, made a presentation to the administrators of Region Six in Detroit. He described principals as people "on the point." It was an appropriate military analogy; principals in this city are, indeed, on the point. They face problems of pupil truancy, teacher absence, and the inability to manage the day-to-day affairs of the school. There's drug traffic in

the corridors, pimps on the street, and pushers waiting outside. It is an environment marked by despondency and despair.

One of our staff members recently shared his reactions to a secondary school where he had been involved in the analysis of a special program. He described the callousness of professionals. He talked about the inability of the school system to keep proper records, to provide transcripts for persons who are going to college. He noted the indifference that school people developed towards young persons. He described how young girls who received failing grades on their report cards were easy prey to pimps. He reported on the aroma of marijuana in school corridors. It was a stark and humbling report. Obviously that description does not characterize all of the junior and senior high schools in Detroit or other large cities, but it is true enough of many of them for us to be extraordinarily concerned about ways to formulate solutions to those problems.

Third Parties and Their Definition

Affairs of government have fallen on hard times. The weight of everyday responsibility is frequently too burdensome for many structures of government to carry effectively. Consequently, administrators, officers and legislative bodies are turning to the "people" for help. The organization or

systematizing of added public input into governmental processes takes many forms and proceeds under several names. "Task Force" is currently very popular; "commission," "committee" and "panel" are also widely used. In each case, citizens are asked to assist with the affairs of government or the affairs of administration. The expectations for the performance of citizens invited to serve in such ways vary too. Most invitations appear to be extended with the genuine hope that noble public purposes will be served. In some cases "bringing in the public" is a stalling tactic or a defusing strategy in tight or volcanic situations.

The practice is not new. It has been going on for some time and at all levels of government. In the late 1960's, the Kerner Commission was established by President Johnson. Its charge was to look extensively and intensively at public disorder. The Commission rendered a report which received wide publicity, and theoretically that report was to affect decision-making at several governmental levels and among many administrative bodies within government. It was also expected to have some impact upon the attitudes of American citizens. The Kerner Commission report did receive wide distribution; it was the subject of discussions on campuses and within public forums across the country. Although there

is no adequate way to measure its effectiveness, the Commission did exist, did prepare and disseminate a public report, and did attract some measure of public note.

The Kerner Commission was usually "public" in its behavior. Its membership and leadership were well known. Another task force also appointed by President Johnson stands in sharp contrast. It was a special group named in the mid-1960's to examine the needs of public education. This "third party," a twelve-member group, also worked intensively upon its charge. It too produced a document, but rendered the report directly to the President and his executive staff. That report led to the legislation known as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. Few people knew then, or are aware now, of that presidential task force. Its report was never made a public record.[3] Few people know its membership even though it included very prominent Americans. Its product was translated immediately into educational legislation--in fact, the most far-reaching in modern times. Less than ninety days passed between the submission of the committee's work and the passage of ESEA. President Johnson's legislative proposal was well received in the Congress; it moved almost immediately from report to legislation.

The term "third party" has a number of meanings. Michael uses "third sector" to describe structures and processes akin to those reported here.[4] Wellington and Winter apply the term "multiparty" to an emerging collective bargaining need in decentralized school districts.[5] In this case, the multiparty would include representation from decentralized sub-units (regions, districts) as well as the central school authority in labor relations with a centralized labor unit.

The Education Task Force is a "third factor" in decision making, respecting the interests of students and parents, and monitoring the work of the Central Board of Education and the professional and non-professional work forces of the Detroit Public Schools. Its independence is protected through nonpublic sources of support, a sustained review of its role and function, and reasonably low profile work habits relative to the community. The parameters of its problem solving effort are not limited to board of education zones of responsibility. It can work through other governmental subdivisions and levels where those decision points are essential to problem solving.

The Detroit Task Force and Its Functions

Detroit is a much studied city. Its libraries are filled with documents produced by study groups, many of which involved citizen bodies and focused upon education. The Romney Report of 1958, several hundred pages in length with dozens of education recommendations, and a citizens' report of 1973, with more of the same, rest on the shelf. There was another report in 1968 and still another in 1971. Each of them involved citizens and, in many cases, professional consultants. Almost none of their recommendations have been implemented.

Literally hundreds of citizen groups have been at work in the interest of improving American education across the country, especially since the Second World War. Such bodies were put in place with varying motivations. Some have been marginally successful but most did not reach the expectations held for them when they were launched. This has been especially true in large cities. In most cases the philosophy and procedure was to do an intensive analysis and write an elegant final report filled with recommendations. In passing those reports along to boards of education, the assumption was that the recipient public bodies contained within themselves the strength, insight, wisdom, and capacity to

implement massive recommendations for change. That proved to be a false assumption.

The leadership of the Detroit Education Task Force, in concert with the leadership of the school system, decided that the design and mission of previous citizen groups had proven inadequate. Thus the philosophy, the performance, the processes, and the practice of this Task Force were to contrast sharply with previous citizen efforts.

In the autumn of 1972, the Detroit Public Schools were on the threshold of bankruptcy. They were facing a 73 million dollar deficit that threatened to shut the school system down by March of 1973. Superintendent Charles J. Wolfe recommended to the Board of Education in October of 1972 that a new citizens' committee be established.[6]

Because of the political and social climate in Detroit, each educational issue becomes a political issue, each educational problem becomes a political problem. Even choosing the membership and leadership of the Task Force became controversial. Board discussions about membership were vigorous and lasted for several weeks. Proposals relative to the number of members, for example, ranged from four to 2,000. The membership issue was resolved at 57 and it was decided that the Task Force would be headed by Co-Chairmen. Each

Task Force member would take part in one of the three internal working committees--the Organization and Management Committee, the Finance Committee, and the Education or teaching/learning Committee.[7]

As indicated earlier, the Task Force is unique in several ways. First is its commitment to problem solving. Second is its serial approach to problem solving, which is at the very heart of its work. Problems are identified, solutions sought, and recommendations forwarded to the Board of Education--one at a time. But members do more than simply review, analyze, and advance recommendations. The Task Force stays with a problem until, in its judgment, it has been satisfactorily resolved. There will be no final report replete with recommendations forwarded to the Board. The Task Force works on an intimate, day-to-day, problem-by-problem basis with an established procedure of formal monthly reports to the Board of Education. Each month a set of recommendations is advanced complete with documentation and attention to problems of implementation, and in some cases cost figures. And the Task Force assists with implementation of its recommendations in creative ways.

Detroit is literally seething with citizen activity in education. The Task Force is only one example. The school

system was decentralized by an act of the State Legislature in 1970. In January of 1971, eight regional boards of education were established that preside, in many cases, over a sector of the city which is larger than smaller cities in the State of Michigan. The enrollments in these regions range somewhere between 26 and 50 thousand students.

Each of the regions has a powerful advisory council that relates to the regional superintendents and the regional boards of education. These councils are aggressive in working with faculty members and principals in defining policies at the building level. They participate often in the choice of the principal and, in more and more instances, are taking part in their removal. In addition to this network of participation, there are dozens of other committees with interests in education that relate to and impact upon the educational system in this city.

In sum the Education Task Force works closely with the Central Board, the Superintendent of Schools, and the executive staff, and is an experiment in third-party problem solving. The Task Force stands in an interesting posture vis-a-vis the constituents and clients of the school system on the one hand and the organized profession of teachers and administrators and the Board of Education on the other. From

its external vantage point, the Task Force works in the interest of the clients of the schools through a pattern of collaboration. As a consequence, we've learned a number of things about the functions of third parties as problem solvers.

A basic function, closely related to the philosophy of the Task Force, is that of problem identification, problem definition, and problem solving. Not all educational problems are self-evident nor are the problem definitions advanced by school systems necessarily accurate. Throughout its history the Task Force has been working, even straining, to refine its problem defining capacities. Related to this particular need is a way of choosing among a series of problems those that warrant priority rankings. In its planning the Task Force has been trying to place priorities on what it will be about. The selection of specific problems involves Task Force leaders, the Steering Committee, and working committees. The ultimate choices of problems are the product of review processes involving members, professional staff, and in most cases representatives of the school system.

The work of the Task Force in 1974-75 is carried by five committees (there were three in 1973-74) each pursuing a problem theme. The five themes are conceptually interrelated but discrete enough to allow for independent work activity.

Theme I: The education committee will pursue problems related to achieving diverse and comprehensive learning opportunities congruent with the needs of children and youth.

Theme II: The organization and management committee will attack problems relevant to developing an organization and management system consistent with program requirements.

Theme III: A new committee on governance is identifying the problems in establishing educational governance which respects the participatory expectancies of diverse persons and populations.

Theme IV: A new committee is examining the exceedingly complex issues of constitutional privilege and responsibility in regard to equality, equity, justice and access.[8]

Theme V: The finance committee is dedicated to putting in place a system of resource aggregation and allocation consistent with the priorities of program need, constitutional mandate, and principles of equitable distribution.

Not all problems identified yield easily to acceptance or to inclusion in the work agenda of a committee. For example it has become increasingly apparent that the school system has two strong authority systems which are contending for school system control. One of these is the established, traditional, bureaucratic authority structure; the other is the Detroit Federation of Teachers. The two structures coexist. Teachers have loyalty to each. It is evident that

little constructive change can take place without the collaboration of the two authority systems. Yet the Task Force has been unable to find ways to approach this problem.

A second extremely important function is that of convener. Persons significant to a particular problem are frequently invited to participate in problem analysis. In the absence of the Task Force, those persons would usually not engage in conjoint activity. Persons from disparate sections of the community are assembled to examine issues which reflect upon the Board of Education and its zone of responsibility. Individuals are convened too to reflect on issues that extend beyond the boundaries of school board authority.[9] Although the Task Force association is primarily with the Board of Education, it is free to make recommendations to the City Council, the State Legislature, and other agencies and institutions where problem solving resources reside.

Related to the convening activity is a third function: providing a forum for the intelligent review of prominent educational issues and problems. As an example, in the early autumn of 1973, the Task Force examined the issue of accountability in some depth. It was not selected as an area for problem solving, but the Task Force produced a position statement on accountability that was made available to

interested community groups, to the public school system in Detroit, and to the State Superintendent of Public Instruction.[10] Persons were convened to examine the paper and share in considering how the Detroit Board of Education could proceed to develop an accountability plan for the Detroit Public Schools.

There are serious problems today in sharpening issues which have severe implications for institutional clients and the professionals who serve those clients. The Task Force has sought means and formats to be applied to improving lay and professional understanding of high stake issues. To that end the Task Force has organized a series of colloquia, providing for the focused examination of issues significant to the Detroit Public Schools. The colloquia are designed as short-term, intensive learning experiences for laymen as well as professionals. The topics selected are of substantial and usually transcendent interest. Each topic is chosen for its potential to begin the public review of issues of significance to laymen and professionals alike. These are public meetings convened in the Conference Center of the Board of Education. Each is video-taped for in-service training purposes within the school system as well as for use by nearby colleges and universities.

A fourth function is as a proxy for disparate community interests. The heterogeneous membership of the Task Force reflects the sentiments, values, and beliefs of many segments of the broader community. The Task Force deals through proxies with that heterogeneity as it reviews and reacts to proposals for change in the Detroit Public Schools. The Task Force is a mediator of the public interest, a translator of preferences into policy directions, a filter of community feeling, an auditor of the public interest. As the months have moved along, it has become apparent that there is substantial significance to proxy activity. It is becoming a fundamental part of what we do.

For years, in Detroit and other major American cities, there were members of boards of education who were able to establish linkage with important sectors of public influence. Board members, often white but not limited to whites, could pick up the telephone and contact individuals who ranked within the top echelons of the city's power structure or, indeed, the power structure of an entire state. They may not have been top influential citizens themselves, but they could tie into the influence structure of the community. Board members now however, are not only not in those power pyramids but they usually do not have access to them.

In many of our cities, school board members are recent arrivals into policy making posts. They have no legacy of community leadership to build upon; no way of tying into the influence structure. They are isolated and their personal isolation contributes to institutional and power isolation. School board membership in Detroit is now available to forty-five citizens. Before 1970 there were seven members on a central board. Short of the Common Council, serving on school boards is about the only arena for public service. There are no training grounds or few steps on the leadership ladder before people become board members.

Many members of the Detroit board(s) are of modest means. They are by and large dedicated but inexperienced. They find their responsibilities after election awesome and overwhelming.[11] Some board members are at ease in relations to their constituencies but others are not. There is a remarkable transformation that takes place when individuals cross the threshold from candidate to incumbent, from campaign rhetoric to board room accountability, from the critic to the criticized. Feelings of aloneness are apparent. Not only do board members find it hard "to deliver" to the satisfaction of their own friends and supporters, but they are cut off from other sources of support. The Task Force helps fill this void.

The fifth function of the Task Force, therefore, is especially critical. It is the linkage function. It stands as an important channel to sources of power and influence. The Task Force has sixty members. The membership is extraordinarily heterogenous. It is, in fact, a microcosm of society in Detroit. There are several bank presidents, the Mayor of the City of Detroit, leaders from a variety of grass roots organizations, the Governor's top aide, several members of the House of Representatives and the Senate, militant black and Chicanoes, the Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Chairman of the Board of the Chrysler Corporation, a delegate from the Office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, civil rights leaders, former school board members, parents, a doctor, and a couple of lawyers. There are persons from the far right and the far left. There are Republicans and Democrats, women and men, rich and poor. There are sharp religious, ethnic, and racial differences; sets of diversity that generate strengths.

Almost daily the Task force or its professional staff participate in linkage activity, more often than not with school officials. Within a matter of minutes, liaison can be established in two directions. Grass roots sentiment can

be tested about an issue or the perspectives of those thought to be in the power structure can be assessed. Within a short time, leaders can be mobilized from the automobile industry --especially the Big Three in the City of Detroit--the unions, the media, the mayor's office; or a network of activity can be established through the telephone involving representatives of state government.

A sixth function of third-party mechanisms is as a legitimizer of goals and directions for the school system. The Education Task Force has forcefully supported the objectives of the Detroit Public Schools. It has worked to reinforce and mobilize resources for the achievement of goals and action programs relating to those goals. For example, the implementation of a Report of the Superintendent's Committee on Achievement has been a major focus of Task Force efforts. A school system committee formed by Superintendent Wolfe produced a report on achievement which was made public in March of 1973. The Task Force examined the document, found it to be of good quality, and endorsed it strongly. From the Task Force's perspective it was a solid piece of work by a public school committee and, in many ways, has served the Task Force as a road map and a compass for some activities in the area of learning outcomes.

Still another function is leadership. Leadership in this context is seizing the initiative, moving into a vacuum, setting in motion a set of events or activities in response to a need. Today's society has serious leadership problems. Leadership is conspicuous by its absence in far too many settings. We have few leadership models in our midst which warrant emulation either in the public or private sectors.

There exists too exhausting inertia in large bureaucracies which imposes exceedingly difficult demands on those who choose to lead. In fact there are genuine concerns about the "limits of leadership." How far can an individual or a group "move" an institution or a society? Large bureaucratic structures are so constraint ridden that leadership appears to be an anachronism, especially if there is an expectation that leadership will emerge from within.

The third party has a genuine advantage, at least initially, of meeting leadership needs. It can alter the existing configuration of forces, it can ask old questions in fresh ways, it can raise new questions, and it can convene groups for their examination. The Task Force works with and through established governments but has an independence, a life of its own. Furthermore it has an impartiality about it which protects its independence. It can affect the lives

of people and institutions as a consequence of the neutral "turf" that it occupies. And it is from that zone of impartiality that it earns respect and consequently, followership.

The Task Force Work History

Out of necessity, the Committee on Finance began its work immediately. The day after the Task Force was established (January 4, 1973), its members went to work with legislators and public officials at the state level as well as local school administrators and the Finance Committee of the Central Board. The Task Force decided to try to keep the schools open for a full 180-day school year. The decision was preceded by sharp debate about the wisdom of that attempt. Many members of the Task Force felt that the schools should close down on March 15, 1973 because of the budget deficit in part, but more significantly because of dissatisfaction with the quality of the schools. The closure alternative was abandoned and the Finance Committee set about funding this enormous debt.

Meetings were held in Lansing with representatives of the Governor's office, the State Treasurer, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, the head of the municipal tax office, delegates from the State House of

Representatives and the State Senate. After lengthy meetings, two special pieces of legislation to fund the debt were fashioned and moved through the State Legislature. These were Public Acts I and II of the 1973-74 session. And they called for interpretation on their constitutionality by the Michigan State Supreme Court.

Task Force leaders expected that the Court would respond quickly, but it did not. There was a five month delay. The waiting period produced an enormous anxiety and tension within the Task Force and Detroit Public School officialdom. There was great concern about constitutionality and delay in the determination was distrubing. If either half of the two-part package was found unconstitutional, the plan for deficit financing would fail. The Finance Committee would have to go back to the drawing board and find an alternate way of financing the debt.

In mid-September, an emergency meeting of key State officials and Detroit representatives was held in Lansing. Twenty intensely busy citizens and public officials sat around a massive conference table in a state office building for a morning trying to decide how to approach the State Supreme Court for the interpretation on constitutionality. Several persons present were friends of justices on the Court, but

none wanted to approach them on a personal basis. The Governor was reluctant to put pressure on the Court and so were members of the State Legislature, the State Treasurer, the State Superintendent, the General Superintendent of the Detroit Public Schools, Citizens Research Council of Michigan, and the Task Force. It took three hours of discussion to decide how the approach to the Court was to be made.[12]

The group finally found a way of fashioning a letter which would come from the Governor's administrative board, directed to the State Supreme Court asking why the interpretation had not been made. The letter was drafted and sent. Within ten days, a decision was in hand. The Supreme Court found half of the package constitutional and the other half unconstitutional. The Task Force and the school system were right back where they started from: seventy-three million dollars in debt and six months of work (and waiting) down the drain.

The Finance Committee went back to work immediately. Persons were convened from the banking community (most of whom were Task Force members) on several occasions to find a way to cover the deficit. The only way was through selling bonds. That solution had been abandoned in early 1973 because of the poor bond risk rating of the city and the

Detroit Public School District. In order to improve the ratings of these two independent governments and eventually to sell bonds at a reasonable interest rate, a full day's visit to Detroit was arranged for representatives of Moodys and Standard and Poor. Each of these bonding houses establishes ratings upon governmental jurisdictions in the United States.

On the day of bonding house visits, a luncheon was convened at a private club in downtown Detroit. New Detroit, Inc., Task Force, school district, and civic leaders were present to speak on behalf of the city and its schools--indeed, the power structure of the business, educational, and financial communities participated in this event. As a result of that luncheon, the Detroit Board of Education received a substantially improved bond rating. It resulted in insurance companies and banks inside and outside of the city to purchase several million dollars in deficit bonds with the assurance that the district was a reasonable risk. The school system stayed open and the interest rate was much improved which will save the taxpayers several million dollars in interest. The intense fiscal crisis was relieved.

To be sure, the financial condition of the system is still desperate, even though it now operates with a balanced

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budget. But there is improved public confidence in the fiscal management system and in the Board of Education's public responsibility. (These events highlight the convening function of a third party in problem solving as well as the linkage function.)

The work of the Task Force Organization and Management Committee began with an intensive review of the administrative structure of the Detroit Public Schools. On August 14, 1973, an extensive report was presented to the Central Board of Education with detailed plans for reorganizing Central and Regional administrative structure. The report itself was prepared with the close collaboration and participation of school officials. The Superintendent of Schools and his staff began the implementation of these recommendations shortly after they were received, but it took nearly eight months for them to be put in place. One of the recommendations called for a department of finance with a new fiscal officer. That person was identified with Task Force help and is now at work developing a new fiscal information system, newly coordinated departments and divisions of payroll, personnel, and budget, and improved applications of computer technology to fiscal problems within the schools.

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A new Division of Educational Services was created and a new configuration of supporting divisions and administrative units was achieved. A new administrative cabinet was formed to establish more intimate linkage between regional administrators and central administrative staff. Several other offices were realigned and tied in different ways to the Office of the General Superintendent. An Office of Superintendency was created with the General Superintendent and the Executive Deputy serving as a team. As indicated before, most of those recommendations have been implemented. Two additional major appointments consistent with the report are expected to complete that phase of implementation.

More recently this committee has focused on warehousing, delivery of books and supplies, and use of space in the School Center Building. It endorsed strongly a joint Task Force staff and school system developed proposal for a massive retraining of administrators and supervisors in the system.[13]

The Education Committee of the Task Force has, in many ways, been confronted with the most challenging assignment of all. Its members have stepped into the quagmire of concerns about the teaching/learning process itself. During 1973-74 the leadership of this committee was in the able hands of a black gynecologist from a prominent Detroit family.

She is Dr. Ethelene Crockett, an impressive person in every respect. She is exceedingly intelligent, energetic, charismatic, and aggressively outspoken about her displeasure with learning outcomes in the Detroit Public Schools.[14]

Members of her committee worked through an exhaustive agenda. Reading and communication skills were the prime focus of attention. The committee made recommendations relative to reading, multi-cultural and multi-ethnic education, and health services. Studies and recommendations about severe forms of alienation and a newly-proposed LinC (Learning in Community) Semester were advanced too. (The LinC Semester would allow secondary school students to have one full semester of productive work in the community for which they would receive credit.) Currently the Education Committee is examining counseling and guidance services and is about to endorse a set of recommendations regarding cable television and community information systems.

The track record of problem solving within the Task Force committee structures has been satisfactory. Members have given generous amounts of time to committee efforts, especially Task Force leaters. But the Task Force work has not been limited to committee sponsored activity.

The 1973 teachers' strike in Detroit was devastating. The bitterness, the heartache, the divisiveness, the near violence that it produced will scar the institution for a long, long time. It divided administrators from teachers, professionals from laymen, and produced extraordinary alienation on the part of persons working at the classroom level.

The bargaining impasse of 1973 grew out of an inability to deal with an "accountability" question. The central administration insisted that it be placed on the table. The union not only rejected the issue of accountability but all porposals for achieving an accountability system. The stalemate nearly tore the school system apart.

In many ways the students of Detroit paid the heaviest price. Their school year extended into the hot, humid Detroit summer--until July 12th. Students attended classes in non-airconditioned buildings with extreme discomfort. They stayed away in droves. Attendance dropped markedly which in turn jeopardized State aid. The strike that necessitated these events was eventually arbitrated by a panel that did not produce a report until mid-March of 1974. The panel established an 8% increase in teachers' salaries. At school's end in July, teachers were tired, administrators

worn out, students discomforted, and parents angry. The prospect of another strike was imminent. The Board and the union had been unable to even begin the 1974-75 bargaining process, much less demonstrate progress in their negotiations.

Because of this vacuum, several people including myself became involved in an attempt to work out a package solution that could be introduced to both parties. In effect a special problem solving third party was put in place. It had been recognized within the Task Force months earlier that bargaining in the public sector was archaic and cumbersome. People who engage in bargaining in the public sector, compared to the private sector, appear to be novices. "Bargainers in public education are still in kindergarten," said one leading Detroit labor leader. The public interest is often poorly served as a consequence.

Leadership for this special third party endeavor came from private sector labor professionals. The third party was composed of eight leaders from the AFL/CIO, the United Auto Workers, the Mayor, and representatives of New Detroit and the Education Task Force. The labor leader members of the group worked around the clock on a package settlement that would be acceptable to both the union and school

officials. The package included wages, the accountability issue, and a modification of class size. It also postponed negotiation on an issue of "teacher residency" until October and swept off the table approximately 100 issues that had been placed there by both parties, postponing action on those until the autumn of 1974.[15] The settlement included the requirement that the bargaining process begin for 1975-76 in October, which would allow the budget to be developed next year with a better indication of the fiscal demands upon that budget to meet salary demands from the several bargaining units.

It was an extremely sensitive and potentially dangerous third party intervention. Had it failed it would have been a conspicuous failure jeopardizing the reputation of the Task Force. A complete scenario of the events that took place during those several days are of textbook proportions and would require more space to recount here than is available. Close to the end of the negotiations four of us met with the top editorial staffs of the metropolitan newspapers and public affairs executives of radio and television stations to prepare them for the announcement in the event a settlement package was achieved. This took place on a Wednesday. The State Mediation Board was approached

and agreed that two mediators would present the package formally to the bargaining teams of the Board and the union on Friday afternoon. A city-wide press conference was held in the Mayor's office the next morning (Saturday) during which representatives of the Task Force, New Detroit, Inc., the Mayor, and other civic leaders endorsed the package.

Associations with media leaders were exceedingly interesting during this period. They were unanimous in their belief that the paralysis of negotiations required third party intervention and that the work of the third party had to remain confidential until the appropriate time. They were likewise unanimous in their judgment that another teachers' strike would not only destroy the school system but the City of Detroit as well.

It was a sensitive, touch-and-go situation. Premature reporting would have blown the entire effort out of the water. The school system, the city, and the State would be plunged right back into the quagmire. And the prospect of constructing a new agreement out of such rubble was dismal indeed. Thus a trade-off with the media was exacted: the third party gave them all of the information about the package, the time table, and time for their editorial writers to prepare editorial statements for Saturday, Sunday, and

Monday editions and broadcasts in return for keeping the story under wraps until Saturday.[16]

As it turned out, this story had a happy ending. Two representatives from the State Mediation Board presented the proposed package to a combined meeting of union and school board representatives at 4 p.m. on Friday, July 12th. The Board of Education and the Superintendent reviewed the proposal as did the Executive Committee of the Detroit Federation of Teachers. There was some static on both sides and for three or four days there was fear that one side or the other would reject the package.

Reconciliation of differences regarding details and the translation of the package into contract language took place. Union leaders submitted the agreement to DFT members by mail referendum. The ballots were tabulated on August 2nd. The vote was overwhelmingly in support of the package. And the strike was avoided.

The success of this effort produced a ground swell of favorable public sentiment. Newspaper, radio, and television editorials were generous in their applause for teachers and school officials for settling. The ad hoc third party was singled out too for special praise. This third party was not the brain child of the Education Task Force alone,

nor was it quarterbacked by the Task Force. The day-to-day, hour-by-hour leadership was provided by Lawrence P. Doss, President of New Detroit, Inc. It was, however, an intensive effort totally in keeping with the problem solving philosophy and commitment of the Task Force.

Supportive Structures

The formal relating of the school system to the Education Task Force is through a school system appointed liaison officer. Ms. Aileen Selick, an exceptionally competent administrator, has served in this capacity through the entire history of the Task Force. It is a delicate, sensitive role requiring respect and confidence from both partners in this collaborative arrangement. Considerable information is transmitted through the liaison office. The General Superintendent and the leadership of the Task Force are dependent upon the competent performance of this role.

The Task Force staff has included professionals from the Citizens Research Council of Michigan headed by a gifted Director, Mr. Robert Pickup. He and his colleagues have taken the lead in the analysis of problems of finance and fiscal administration as well as administrative reorganization. Their staff work for the Finance Committee and the Organization and Management Committee and enabled these

sub-groups to progress rapidly. Their competence highlights the significance of solid staff work to support the efforts of thoughtful laymen involved in third party activity.

The institutions of higher education in Southeast Michigan have been involved in important ways too. George Gullen, the President of Wayne State University, is Chairman of an important Advisory Committee from Higher Education. Several post-secondary institutions have joined in the common objective of assisting the Detroit Public Schools. Individual faculty members, graduate students, and administrators from these institutions have been involved in a broad range of Task Force activities. Their spirit of participation in mutual problem solving is very impressive. In prospect for next year is a thorough examination of teacher, counselor and administrator preparation, and the development (in cooperation with the State Superintendent) of a teaching improvement center in Detroit.

Over the past months some noteworthy developments occurred relative to the joint research interests of higher education and the Detroit Public Schools. A research policy panel was established and a jointly sponsored research seminar was held. New formats for collaboration have been discovered which promise to improve the utilization as well as the generation of knowledge.

Through the assistance of Ohio State University a "Superintendents Issues Seminar" has been established. It was designed on the basis of a year's work in Columbus utilizing Harold Lasswell's concept of the "decision seminar."[17] After several months of Detroit experience, it appears that the system's leadership is on the threshold of an important new teaching, learning, and planning tool. The seminar's central purposes are:

--to serve as an efficient and effective learning instrument
--to extend understanding of transcendent issues in our midst
--to allow for collective reflection on such issues
--to produce analyses of issues with practical meanings
--to enlarge individual and group perspective relative to issues
--to enhance the system's anticipatory capacity
--to locate the basic problems that inhabit issues
--to enlarge collective reflection on issues in order to improve communication
--to focus on the present and the future - simultaneously.

Ancillary purposes are:

--to test a new mechanism for institutional planning and problem solving
--to discover the range and types of data required for issue analysis
--to discover more about the affective properties of data
--to identify the best resources (human, printed, etc.) to bring to bear on issues.

The Detroit Decision Seminar at Ohio State during 1973-74 was of substantial importance to the Education Task Force

work in Detroit. Harold Lasswell and Richard Snyder were key figures in the development of the seminar as was Larry Slonaker, a specialist in communications theory and technology. The seminar was conducted in a specially developed, data saturated, "map and strategy" room.

A room was converted at Ohio State into a unique decision context. Tracks were suspended from the ceiling which allow the display of data about Michigan, the SMSA, the City of Detroit, and the Detroit Public School System. In the center of the room there is a "decision cake." It is a mechanism for displaying Lasswell's social process, problem-solving model. The content for the seminar was the set of issues confronting the Detroit Public Schools. The analysis of the issues was displayed before seminar participants on the "decision cake."

Seminar participants were immersed in information about the total environment of Detroit. We were aware simultaneously of economic data significant to problem solving in Detroit, demographic data significant to problem solving in Detroit, and educational data significant to problem solving in Detroit. We were aware of the goals that have been adopted for city purposes, educational purposes, southeastern Michigan purposes, and State of Michigan purposes. We learned a

great deal about data, about the affective quality of data, the misleading nature of certain kinds of data, the difficulty of synthesizing and integrating complex data from many sectors, each of which has significance in its own terms for a particular policy or decision before the Board of Education.

The Superintendents Issues Seminar focuses on the transcendent over-arching, meta, large-scale issues confronting the schools.[18] The first issue was retrenchment: the no-growth society, zero population growth, declining enrollments in the public schools, plateauing tax bases within the City of Detroit and the State of Michigan, declining levels of employment, the unemployability of young persons within the school district, and the meaning of a fatiguing, declining, constraining, contracting environment for the schools. The implications of these circumstances for personnel, programs, use of school facilities, and finance are under consideration.[19]

Learnings

We have learned that the premises undergirding the problem solving commitment of the Task Force are essentially sound. Problem solving in urban education is possible, the serial approach makes sense, and citizens can perform third party roles effectively.

We have learned that conjoint activity involving board of education members and school officials linked collaboratively with outsiders must be based on trust. We've learned how difficult trust and confidence are to construct and maintain. We have learned that an over-dependence on the part of the board of education is dangerous. We have witnessed first-hand the meaning of the "love-hate" relationship and, on occasion, the emotions involved in "detente."

We have learned about effecting change in large bureaucratic structures. We have developed new respect for its glacial nature, for the impotence in achieving change produced by co-existing, contending, and often contentious authority systems. As indicated earlier, in Detroit, the teachers have loyalties to two powerful authority structures. At times, those loyalties flow in response to the traditional, legal, bureaucratic system. At other times loyalties flow to the Detroit Federation of Teachers. No significant change can take place without the laying on of hands by both of these powerful authority systems.

To achieve change, we've learned that multiple and simultaneous interventions must take place. Those interventions must be informed by understandings of the behavior of multiple authority structures.

We have learned about citizen participation. We know that it is possible to construct a genuine learning community through the participation of dedicated citizens. We know too that it is possible to achieve remarkable power from difference. It is possible to locate the chemistry which releases human talent for constructive public purposes. We have learned that communication among widely diverse persons is many, many times more difficult than we had assumed. Citizens have widely divergent styles, preferences, and needs for participation. We have also observed that school officials have substantially more comfort and skill in relating to middle or upper class citizens than they do in relating to lower class citizens.

We have learned that much if not most of the energy available in a large bureaucratic enterprise and its governance system is expended on adult concerns, not the concerns of children and youth. The issues in Detroit of residency, labor negotiations, even desegregation, are predominantly adult centered--not child centered.

We have learned that there are vast reservoirs of talent within a large bureaucracy that are unreleased, blunted, or even destroyed because of misperceptions about the application of rules and regulations and the narrowness imposed on human performance by negotiated contracts.

We have learned about the incredible gap between higher education and the lower schools. We have discovered new ways to build institutional bridges, to refine patterns of constructive linkage, to overcome the impotence that those of us in higher education possess. The reconstruction of trust is the point of beginning and what proceeds from that humble beginning is slow and tortuous.

We have learned that large scale, comprehensive reform of urban educational systems must be considered in large time frames. We believe that the schools should consider a design that would consume a decade. Each day we recognize more fully that there are no short run options, no panaceas.

We have learned too that the key is leadership--lay and professional, striking common cause, marching to the same drummer. We have learned that the issues which are transcendent, meta, overarching are more important than the trivial. We have learned that the transcendent can capture the devotion and the energies of very diverse persons. We have learned that there are energies available within the society in large quantity to be mobilized for noble public purpose. We have learned that to lead is to expend--it is to expend large amounts of intellectual effort (blended with

a generous seasoning of affect) in understanding complexity, in dismantling large puzzling problems, in examining manageable parts, and over time, making visible progress with the large questions. We have learned that the concept of third parties has been insufficiently explored. But based on our experience, we believe the notion of third party has extraordinary potential, especially in leadership and change terms.

Footnotes

1. Each week, for the past sixteen months, I have spent several days in Detroit serving as Executive Director of a large citizens' committee. It affords me the opportunity to observe the problems of everyday management and administration within the largest single institution in the State of Michigan. It permits me to witness and take part in an intensive citizen effort to solve the problems of the Detroit Public Schools. And it allows me to retain my academic ties within a large public university, The Ohio State University. On Saturdays I teach a class in urban administration at Ohio State and on alternate Mondays during 1973-74 met with 25 major faculty members from across the entire Ohio State University who joined me in a "Detroit Decision Seminar" considering the problems of Detroit. I have the very best of two worlds. In many ways my esperience parallels that described by Harold Lasswell as the policy science intermediary, the go-between, who operates within the scientific and academic community and participates in the decision process itself. See Harold D. Lasswell, A Preview of the Policy Sciences. (New York: American Elsevier Publishing Company, Inc., 1971), pp 6-8.

2. The current ratio is undoubtedly being affected in some measure by the July 25, 1974 Supreme Court decision although there are no data available to indicate a rapid acceleration of flight from the city. The Detroit Public School system is experiencing enrollment declines. The projections of one through twelfth grade enrollments indicate that the 226,878 1974-75 figure will be reduced to 160,964 in 1984-85. The number of births will drop from 31,058 in 1964 to 18,500 in 1978, or a 40% reduction. These changes have implications for personnel, school construction, and finance. For a further report see Ronald B. Thompson, "Projection of Enrollments, Public Schools, City of Detroit, 1975-84." November, 1974. (Mimeographed, Mershon Center, The Ohio State Univesity.)

3. One study of the commission was completed by C. Philip Kearney at the University of Chicago. See C. Philip Kearney. "The 1964 Presidential Task Force on Education and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1967).

4. Donald N. Michael, On Learning To Plan - and Planning To Learn. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1973) p. 6.

5. Harry H. Wellington and Ralph K. Winter, Jr. The Unions and the Cities. (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1971), pp. 150-152.

6. The Board of Education unanimously approved the resolution to create the Task Force. There is an important set of preceding events leading up to the Board's decision. Powerful members of New Detroit, Inc., including the 1972 Chairman of the Board of Directors of New Detroit, Lynn Townsend, urged the chairman of the School Board, James Hathaway, to consider still another citizen effort to help the schools. There was sharp resistance to the idea among school board members in the summer of 1972, but as the fiscal crisis mounted day by day, that resistance ebbed away.

7. Task Force membership was re-examined in the autumn of 1974. Several persons were added and some shifts were made to accommodate changes in the make-up of the Senate and House of Representatives as a consequence of the November elections. Two new representatives from the Latino community were named.

8. This committee has adopted an extraordinary set of potential agenda items. Under consideration now are the constitutional and statutory issues

   (a) having to do with integration, segregation, or desegregation;
   (b) having to do with the legal/constitutional meaning of the school district;
   (c) having to do with the constitutional meaning of a "uniform and common system of schools for Michigan";
   (d) having to do with equal access to the resources of the state relative to finance;

8. (continued)
   (e) having to do with the rights of children, parents, teachers, and administrators;
   (f) having to do with the issues related to where one lives and where one works.

9. For example, the Task Force and the Board of Education are sharing responsibility for convening a city-wide conference on children and youth. The conference idea was initiated by the Task Force.

10. The District was in the throes of a severe teachers strike at this time. Accountability was such an emotional issue that the Task Force leadership chose not to intervene directly into the strike (and the accountability maelstrom) but decided to examine the question for its own benefit and without specific recommendations to the Central Board of Education. The Task Force in its early history found two issues so emotionally charged that it could not treat them within its own membership, let alone advance ideas in their regard. They were problems of responding to the integration-segregation questions and the examination of the public interest questions of collective bargaining, public sector--education.

11. For further observations see Raphael O. Nystrand and Luvern L. Cunningham "Dynamics of Local Control" Special Report: The U.S. Office of Education, June 1973.

12. This was a lesson to me personally, an individual saturated with naivete about such affairs. My inclination would have been to call the Chief Justice and find out where the decision was. Obviously it was not to turn out to be that simple.

13. An audit of the years of remaining service of present administration and supervisors in the Detroit Public Schools was most revealing. There is 35,000 years of service left in that work force--350 centuries.

14. Dr. Crockett became a co-chairman in September, 1974. She joined Alfred M. Pelham and Stanley J. Winkelman. Pelham and Winkelman are equally impressive and dedicated. Their effectiveness as leaders accounts for a large measure of the third party's success. Similarly other committee leaders have been unusually effective in maintaining Task Force momentum.

15. The Detroit Board of Education passed a resolution requiring that teachers, counselors, and administrators live inside Detroit. The resolution was immediately challenged in the courts by the Detroit Federation of Teachers. The Michigan Supreme Court determined that the matter be returned to the system as a negotiable item.

16. As it turned out, the Detroit Free Press ran a late Friday edition story on the settlement. It was given to William Grant, the principal Free Press education writer by Mary Ellen Riordan, the head of the Detroit Federation of Teachers. It set the stage nicely for the press conference in Mayor Young's office on Saturday morning.

17. Lasswell, op. cit.

18. Some seminar "is" and "is nots" may be of interest. The Seminar is an opportunity for top administrators to test an idea. The Seminar is not a proven instrument. The Seminar is a planning tool to the extent that it is problem anticipatory. The Seminar is not a problem solving device in itself. The Seminar is limited to a small membership in the beginning, the Seminar is not designed for large membership. The Seminar is to be issue centered as much as possible. The Seminar is not to be problem dominated. The Seminar is to consider a broad range of data. The Seminar is not to be limited to within-system issues. The Seminar is to draw heavily upon Detroit system data. The Seminar is not to be limited to system-produced information. The Seminar is to include outside experts and resource persons from time-to-time. The Seminar is not to be a platform for outsiders. The Seminar is for participation in issue analysis. The Seminar is not a setting for soliloquizing. The Seminar is, above all, a learning instrument. The Seminar is not a location for ventilation. The Seminar is to meet a system need. The Seminar is not to duplicate existing planning and learning instruments.

19. The data displayed in the map and strategy room at Ohio State University has been reproduced for the Superintendents Issues Seminar in Detroit.